

The Witness of John the Baptist on an Early Byzantine Icon in Kiev

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Since the discovery and publication of the large collection of icons at Mount Sinai, interest in the study of Byzantine icons has grown steadily. Weitzmann's first volume of the Sinai icons (1976) has brought to scholarly attention the great richness and variety among the early Byzantine icons.¹ At the same time, the work of Grabar² and Kitzinger,³ and more recently of Averil Cameron⁴ and Peter Brown,⁵ has increased our awareness and understanding of the cult of icons. And, as a result of the numerous studies devoted to the issue of Iconoclasm and the defense of images, our understanding of what icons meant to their Byzantine audience has been greatly enhanced.⁶ Nevertheless, there seems to be some disparity in the study of the *phenomenon* of icons as opposed to the objects themselves. Individual pre-Iconoclastic icons have not been interpreted sufficiently as products of the development and intensification of the cult of images—as objects whose subject matter and style betray their makers' involvement with the questions of the function and meaning of icons. There are obvious exceptions, such as Weitzmann's

important study of *loca sancta* iconography in icons and other objects of the Early Byzantine period,⁷ and Kitzinger's discussion of the different modes of representation used for the Virgin, angels, and saints in the Sinai icon of the Virgin with Sts. Theodore and George.⁸ But it is far too often the case that art historians studying these early icons have become preoccupied with the question of style, especially as it relates to date and provenance, and especially as cast in the dichotomy of classicism or Hellenism versus abstraction. This is particularly unfortunate, since it is increasingly apparent that the date and provenance of these icons will never be settled on the basis of stylistic analysis alone, unless perhaps new, dated comparanda come to light. At present, for example, the famous Pantokrator icon is dated by Chatzidakis and Weitzmann to the mid-sixth century and by Kitzinger to around 700. That of the Virgin and Child with Sts. Theodore and George is dated by Weitzmann to around the middle of the sixth century and by Kitzinger to the first half of the seventh.⁹

Another case in point is the icon of John the Baptist from Mount Sinai, now in Kiev (Fig. 1). On this rather small icon (46.8 × 25.1 cm), John the Baptist is shown pointing to an image of Christ in a medallion over his right shoulder, while a medallion image of the Virgin appears over his left. John

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¹K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, I (Princeton, 1976).

²A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, II (Paris, 1946), 343 ff.

³E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150; rpr. in Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington, Ind., 1976).

⁴See her "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," along with other articles on the cult of images collected in Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London, 1981).

⁵P. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981).

⁶See, for example, the essays collected in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977).

⁷K. Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *DOP* 28 (1974), 31–55.

⁸E. Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm," *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress, München, 1958* (Munich, 1958), IV.1, 1–50; rpr. in Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*. See also Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 117.

⁹For a review of these problems see J. Trilling, "Sinai Icons: Another Look," *Byz* 53 (1983), 300–311. Trilling dates the icon of Christ to the second quarter of the 7th century. See also the reviews of Weitzmann's first volume on the Sinai icons by S. Spain in *ArtB* 62 (1980), 153–56; by H. Maguire in *Speculum* 53 (1978), 425–27; and by A. Cutler in *ByzSt* 3 (1976), 109–11.

holds a scroll in his left hand inscribed with his words from John 1:29: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." This icon is rarely discussed in any depth in the scholarly literature; nearly all the attention it has received has centered on its date and provenance. It is generally recognized as one of the earliest preserved icons. Most scholars suggest a sixth-century date, but the end of the fifth has also been proposed. Though he dates the icon "about sixth century," Weitzmann concludes in his catalogue entry: "If any icon possibly reaches back as far as the end of the fifth century, it is this John icon, and it may well be the earliest one we have from Sinai."¹⁰

Weitzmann suggested a comparison to the Vienna Genesis, a manuscript which, though not securely dated, is generally attributed to the early to mid-sixth century. He compared the illusionistic background, which can only be glimpsed at the upper left of the badly flaked icon, to those in some miniatures of the Vienna Genesis (Fig. 2).¹¹ In a brief mention of the icon in his article, "On Some Icons of the Seventh Century," Kitzinger suggested that the busts in the medallions in the icon's upper corners are comparable to some of the heads in the Vienna Genesis.¹² However, neither author offered any points of comparison specific enough to warrant the conclusion that the icon and the manuscript are close in date. Likewise, neither author was able to adduce any comparison to a specific, dated work. In fact, Kitzinger admitted that the icon of St. John "shows no specific connection with any of the other icons or with datable paintings elsewhere."¹³

It seems that the primary basis for the early dating of this icon is its supposed close connection to the classical tradition. Weitzmann finds the connection to classicism in "the relaxed stance and the torsion of the figure" which "reveal a freedom of movement"; in the "treatment of the highlights" which "by the irregularity of their lines, gives an impression of fleeting light"; and in "the realism of John's face."¹⁴ For Kitzinger, it is the icon's "loose and cursive style" that connects it to the classical tradition and thus indicates the early date.¹⁵ But

we have learned from the work of both these scholars that classicism is not necessarily a function of date. It may as often be chosen as a mode of representation due to a work's subject or intended meaning, the function it was meant to serve, or the patron for whom it was made. As Kitzinger has shown, classicism, or Hellenism, remained a choice for artists working in the seventh century, as well as in the fifth or sixth. The silver plates from the reign of Heraclius are an indication of this. In the medium of painting, the frescoes from S. Maria Antiqua of both the first half of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century exhibit a marked degree of Hellenism, which Kitzinger and others attribute to stylistic impulses coming from Constantinople.¹⁶ Painting in a convincing, illusionistic style also continued to be practiced in the area of Syria-Palestine at least through the end of the sixth century, as evidenced by the Rabbula Gospels of A.D. 586 and the related Syriac Bible of Paris (cod. syr. 341).¹⁷

In fact, the closest comparisons I have found for the icon of John the Baptist are some of the full-page miniatures in the Rabbula Gospels (Figs. 3, 4).¹⁸ The figure of John can be compared to that of Christ in the Ascension image, both in terms of proportions and facial type.¹⁹ John the Baptist and Christ, as well as the other figures in the Ascension and Crucifixion images, are solid, well-proportioned figures standing firmly on the ground in a variety of anatomically convincing poses. One can also compare the head of the Virgin on the icon to those in the Rabbula Crucifixion and Myrophores scenes. The shape of the head is similar, as well as the use of a few bold strokes and some white highlights to define the features. The use of patches of blue and white to define the background of mountain and sky might also be similar, but the icon is too badly flaked to tell. However, although the icon and the miniatures share a certain angularity in the treatment of drapery folds, there is no precise parallel in the Rabbula Gospels for the bold, linear treatment of the highlights on John the Baptist's drapery.

¹⁰ Weitzmann, *Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 32–35, with earlier bibliography.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² E. Kitzinger, "On Some Icons of the Seventh Century," *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of A. M. Friend, Jr.* (Princeton, 1955), 139 note 26; rpr. in Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Weitzmann, *Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 34.

¹⁵ Kitzinger, "On Some Icons of the Seventh Century," 139 note 26.

¹⁶ Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making*, chaps. 6 and 7.

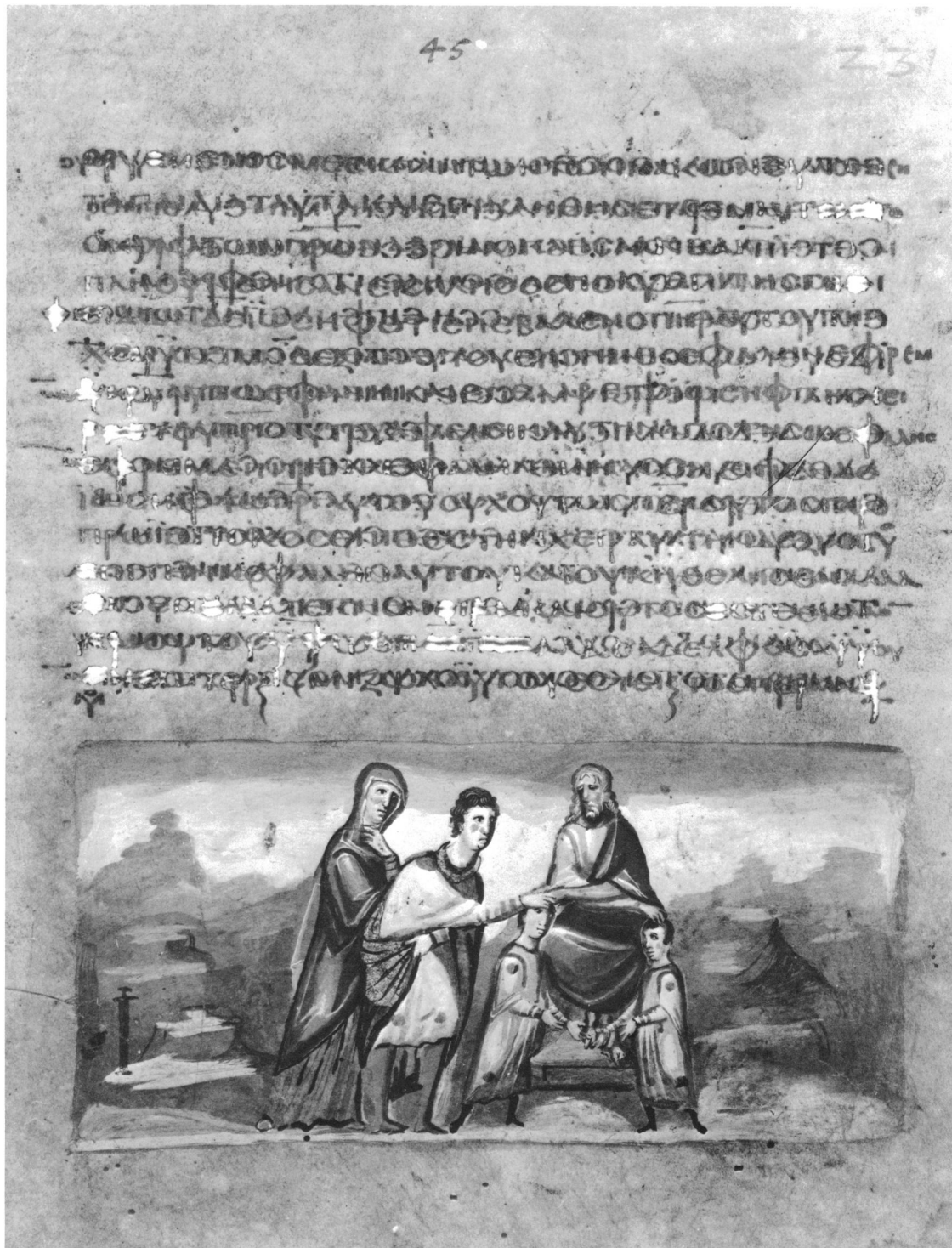
¹⁷ C. Cecchelli, G. Furlani, M. Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels* (Olten-Lausanne, 1959); M. Mundell Mango, "Where was Beth Zagba," *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. C. Mango and O. Pritsak (= *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 [1983]) (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 405–30; J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures* (Paris, 1964), 208 ff.

¹⁸ The two works are not so different in scale; the icon measures 46.8 × 25.1 cm, and the framed miniatures 27 × 24 cm.

¹⁹ Such a comparison was suggested by Spain in her review of Weitzmann's catalogue of the Sinai icons in *ArtB* 62 (1980), 155.



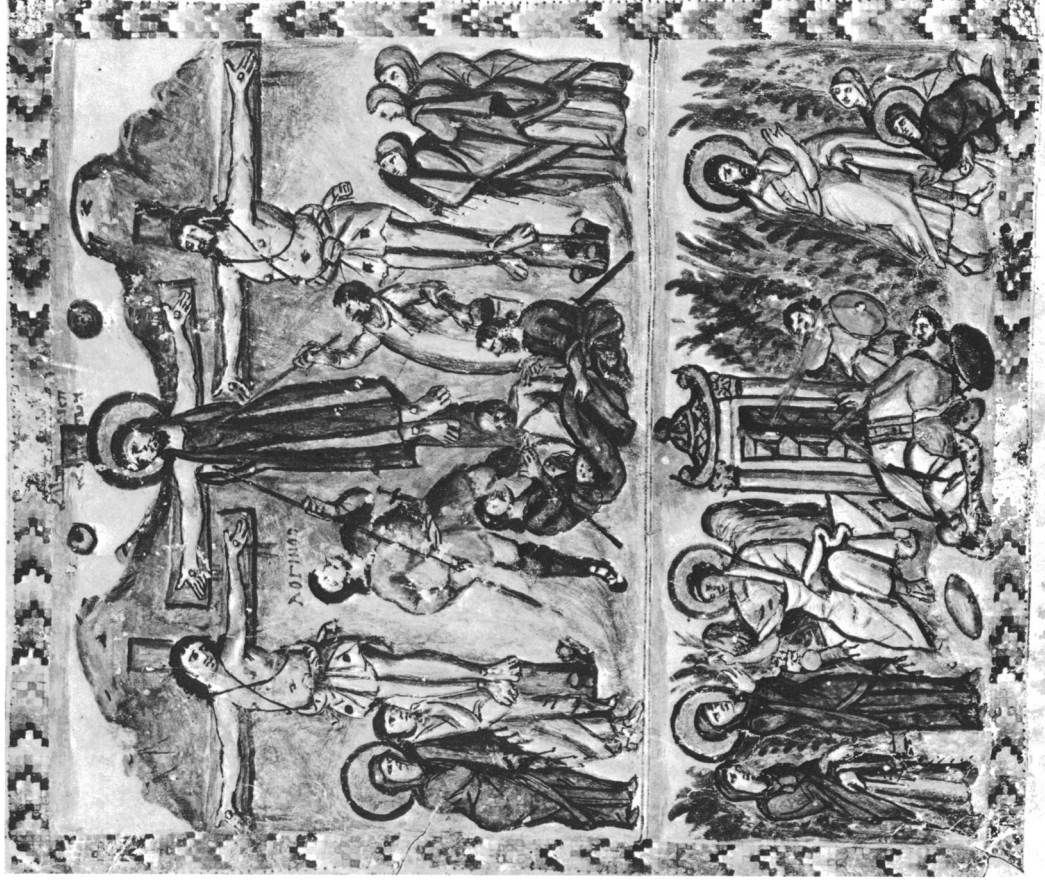
- 1 Kiev, Museum of Western and Oriental Art, icon of John the Baptist
(photo: after K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons, I*
[Princeton, 1976], pl. xiv)



2 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. theol. gr. 31, pict. 45, Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (photo: Bildarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek)



3 Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. I.56, fol. 13v, Ascension
(photo: Guido Sansoni, Florence)



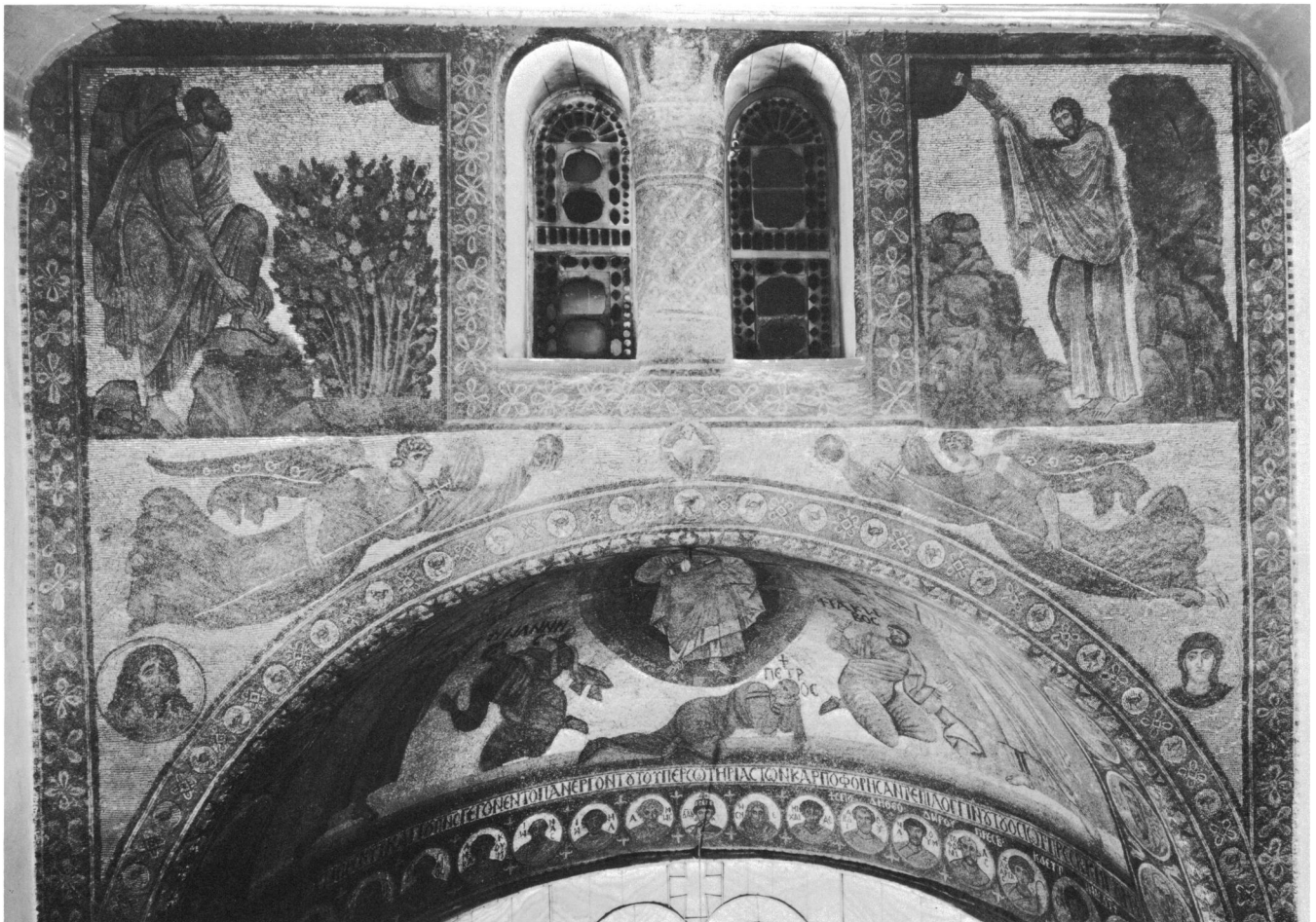
4 Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Plut. I.56, fol. 13r, Crucifixion,
Myrophores (photo: Guido Sansoni, Florence)



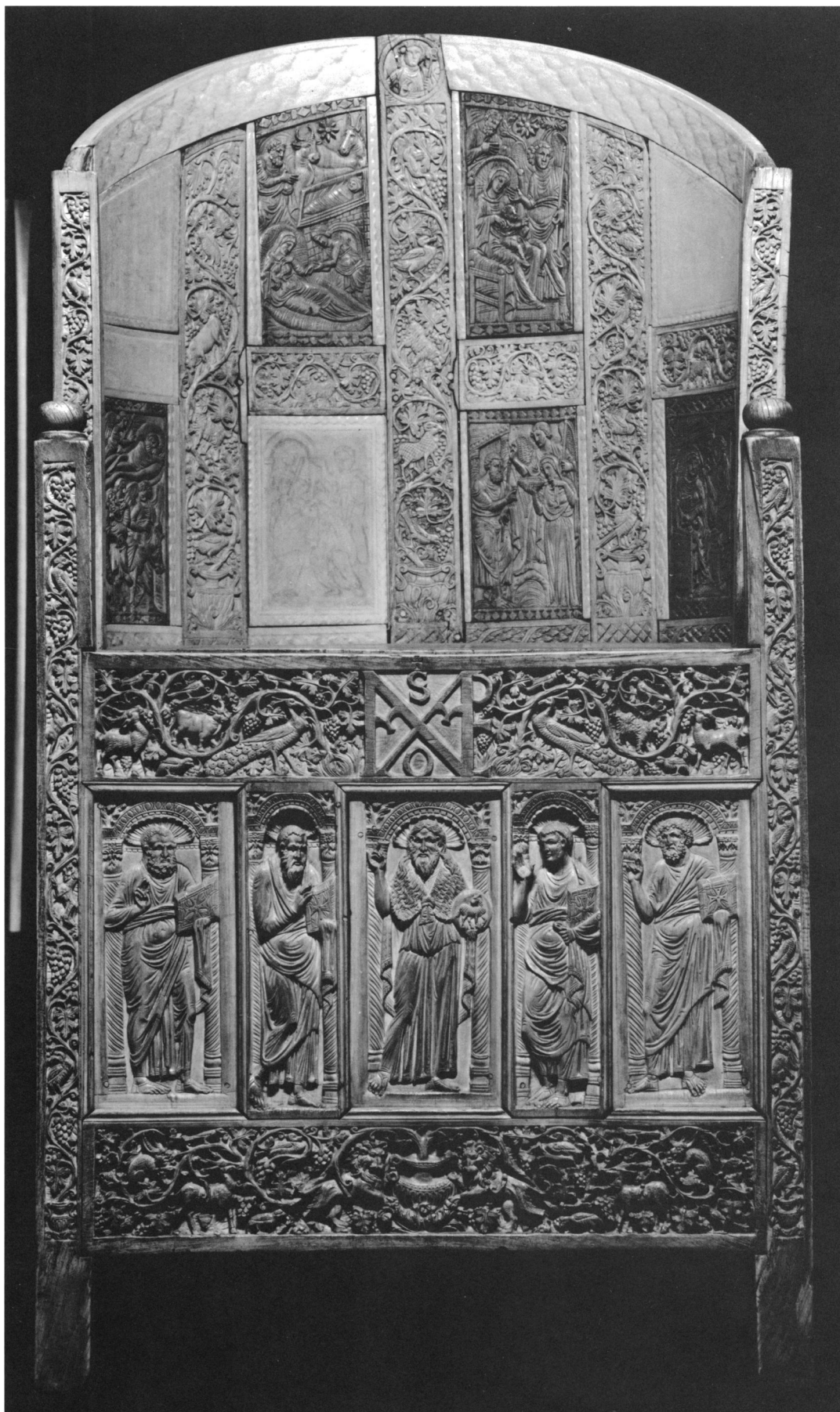
5 Poreč, Eufrasius Cathedral, interior, apse and triumphal arch (photo: courtesy Robert Ousterhout)



6 Bobbio, S. Colomban, Ampulla No. 20, Christ in Glory, with the Virgin, Zacharias, and John the Baptist (after N. Thierry, *Zograf* 5 [1974], 17)



7 Sinai, St. Catherine, interior, apse and triumphal arch
(photo: courtesy Michigan-Princeton- Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)



8 Ravenna, Archepiscopal Palace, Maximianus Cathedra (photo: Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich)



9 Rome, S. Maria Antiqua, south face of southeast pier, Christ with the Virgin, John the Baptist, and Pope Martin I (photo: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome)



10 Rome, S. Maria Antiqua, general view looking south toward sanctuary (photo: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome)



11 Rome, S. Maria Antiqua, sanctuary, triumphal arch, west side, lower zone, Sts. Basil and John Chrysostom (photo: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome)

Given the paucity of other evidence, it is difficult to know what to conclude from these general similarities. Was the icon of John the Baptist produced around the time of the Rabbula Gospels? Or do the similarities indicate that the icon was produced in the same geographical area as the Rabbula Gospels? It seems that in this case stylistic analysis can only take us so far in any attempt to date and localize this icon. Perhaps it is best to leave this problem aside for the moment and focus on one of the other questions that one might ask about this icon, namely, its meaning.

One of the most striking things about the icon of John the Baptist is that it seems to correspond precisely to the point of view expressed in Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council of A.D. 692:

On some venerable images is depicted a lamb at whom the Forerunner points with his finger; this has been accepted as a symbol of Grace, showing us in advance, through the Law, the true Lamb, Christ our Lord. While embracing the ancient symbols and shadows inasmuch as they are signs and anticipatory tracings handed down to the Church, we give preference to the Grace and the Truth which we have received as the fulfillment of the Law. Consequently, in order that the perfect should be set down before everybody's eyes even in painting, we decree that [the figure of] the Lamb, Christ our God, who removes the sins of the world, should henceforward be set up in human form on images also, in place of the ancient lamb, inasmuch as we comprehend thereby the sublimity of the humiliation of God's Word, and are guided to the recollection of His life in the flesh, His Passion and His salutary Death, and the redemption which has thence accrued to the world.²⁰

Given this correspondence between the icon and the canon, it is important to ask what sort of relationship might exist between them. Was the icon intended to conform to the canon or at least to express the viewpoint that resulted in its promulgation? The purpose of this article is to show that this is indeed the case. An analysis of the development of John the Baptist iconography and the role of John the Baptist in religious writings of the period

should make it clear that this icon is best understood in the context of the seventh-century controversies over the nature of Christ and of his image that led up to the Council of 692. Such an analysis should also deepen our understanding of why the council chose to express its preference for images of Christ in human form by citing the example of John the Baptist. Why did the council members decide that the image of John the Baptist pointing at the lamb, which seems to capture so well the words of John's gospel ("Behold the lamb of God . . ."), was no longer appropriate?

The main focus of the icon is the relationship between the figure of John the Baptist and the image of Christ over his right shoulder. The contact between John and Christ is emphasized by John's upward gaze and his gesturing right hand. Christ returns John's gaze, while the Virgin in the medallion over John's left shoulder also turns toward them. The nature of the relationship between Christ and John is explained by the words inscribed on the scroll John holds in his left hand: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). The text indicates that John's function here is as the witness of Christ: he points out the one who sacrificed himself for the redemption of humankind. It is also important that the one who will redeem humankind is represented on the icon in human form. On one level it can be argued that the icon simply conforms to the text of John 1:29–36, in which it is reported that John saw Christ coming toward him and pointed him out to his two disciples, saying "Behold the lamb of God . . ." ²¹ But given the fact that the "lamb of God" was commonly represented in the Early Christian period as a lamb, it is important to see the representation of Christ here in human form as a conscious choice, and to ask what this choice signified.

In the Gospels John's primary function is to bear witness to Christ. John gives witness when he points out Christ as the lamb of God (John 1:29), and also when he baptizes Christ. At the baptism

²⁰For the text see Mansi, XI, 977, or P. Joannou, ed. and trans., *Discipline générale antique (IIe–IXe s.)*, Pontificia commissione per la redazione del codice di diritto canonico orientale, Fonti 9 (Rome, 1962), 218–20. Eng. trans. from C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), 139–40. Unfortunately the only records preserved from the Council of 692 are the 102 canons and the list of signatories. The acts, which might have shed some light on the thinking of those who drafted Canon 82, have been lost. On this council see V. Laurent, "L'oeuvre canonique du concile in Trullo (691–692), source primaire du droit de l'Eglise orientale," *REB* 23 (1965), 7–41; and F. R. Trombley, "The Council in Trullo (691–692): A Study of the Canons Relating to Paganism, Heresy and the Invasions," *Comitatus* 9 (1978), 1–18, whom I would like to thank for discussing this canon with me.

²¹Weitzmann, *Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 33–34, suggested that the image on the Kiev icon ultimately derives from a narrative scene in which John points out Christ to his two disciples. I do not think it is necessary to posit a narrative pictorial source for this icon. However, this episode from the Gospels could very well have been illustrated in the Early Christian period. It has been suggested that the narrative scene of John pointing out Christ to his disciples on the Carolingian Arch of Einhard may derive from an Early Christian gospel book. See H. Belting, "Das Zeugnis des Johannes und die Verkündigung an Maria, die beiden Szenen des Einhardsbogens," *Das Einhardskreuz, Vorträge und Studien der Münsteraner Diskussion zum Arcus Einhardi*, ed. K. Hauck (Göttingen, 1974), 68–81.

John bears witness to Christ's divinity. This is emphasized in the Gospel of John, in which the actual baptism is not described but only recalled by the Baptist: "And John bore witness, 'I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God'" (John 1:32–34). Up until the sixth century it was this aspect of John's witness that Christian artists chose to represent. As far as one can tell from the surviving monuments, prior to the sixth century John the Baptist was represented only in scenes of the Baptism of Christ.²² In these images the revelation of Christ's divinity is represented by the dove of the Holy Spirit over the head of Christ and the hand of God appearing from a segment of sky.²³

In the sixth century Christian artists began to represent John the Baptist as an isolated figure.²⁴ The contexts in which John appears indicate that he is to be understood as a witness not only to Christ's divinity but to his humanity as well. John's role as witness to Christ's humanity was also a topic for Christian writers; hymns and sermons of the period stressed this, along with the fact that John's testimony was based on physical experience. Such testimony was important in the context of contemporary debates over the relationship between the human and the divine in Christ. In response to Monophysitism, which was professed in a number of variations during the sixth and seventh centuries, the Orthodox found it necessary to emphasize Christ's human nature.²⁵

There is an emphasis on John's role as witness to Christ's humanity in the sixth-century hymn of Romanos the Hymnographer (d. ca. 560), *On the Epiphany*. The hymn contains a dialogue between Christ and John before the Baptism in which the importance of John's physical experience is emphasized. Christ says: "For you will achieve honor from this such as did not fall to the lot of the an-

gels; for I shall make you greater than all the prophets. No one of them saw me clearly, but rather in figures, shadows and dreams. But today you see, you touch the unapproachable light, for he stands before you according to his will" (strophe 10).²⁶ A dialogue between John the Baptist and Christ is also included in the homily *On the Holy Baptism* by Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem from 634–638. In this dialogue John asks how man can dare to touch divinity, a consuming fire. He worries that he, as a man, would be consumed immediately by the fire. Christ answers his fears: "If you are my prophet and my precursor, why do you not see prophetically that I was conceived in the womb of a virgin . . . and as an infant I was carried in the maternal arms, and that nothing has happened of which you are afraid, because everything that I have done, I have done corporeally, having come not to judge the world, but to save it from tribulations."²⁷ In expressing his fear, John shows his recognition of Christ's divinity, but apparently at the expense of Christ's humanity. Sophronius has Christ himself remind John that as a prophet of the truth, he should be able to see the reality of Christ's human nature. He also reminds John of the crucial connection between the Incarnation and the Redemption: the Redemption of humankind depended on Christ's real human death. Sophronius was a staunch defender of the reality of Christ's humanity, which included for him a human will. His insistence on the two wills in Christ

²² Romanos le Mélode, *Hymnes*, ed. and trans. J. Grosdidier de Matons, II, SC 110 (Paris, 1965), 248–50. Eng. trans. based on M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I* (Columbia, Mo., 1970), 53–54.

²³ Sophronius of Jerusalem, *On the Holy Baptism*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta hierosolymitikes stachyologias*, V (1888; rpr. Brussels, 1963), 158. Text discussed in C. von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jerusalem. Vie monastique et Confession dogmatique* (Paris, 1972), 166. John's fear of being burned by the divine presence is also expressed in Romanos the Hymnographer's first hymn on the Epiphany. Here also Christ overcomes John's fear by reminding him of his human birth. See Romanos le Mélode, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, II, 244, 252. The same theme can be traced back even earlier to the hymn on Christ and John the Baptist by Ephraem the Syrian (ca. 306–373). In addition to expressing his fear of being burned, John also argues that the river Jordan is too small to contain Christ's mightiness. Christ answers, "The womb is smaller than the Jordan; yet was I willing to lodge in the Virgin; and as I was born from woman, so too am I to be baptized in the Jordan." Thus here already Christ assuages John's fears by reminding him of his humanity. However, the subject is not elaborated on to the same degree as in the sermon of Sophronius. See Ephraem des Syrs *Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO, Scriptorum Syri (Louvain, 1959), vol. 82, 217 ff; Ger. trans., vol. 83, 202–3, verses 11, 19, 20; Eng. trans. from *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter *LNPF*), 2nd ser., XIII (New York, 1898; rpr. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956), 284–85.

²⁴ K. Wessel, "Johannes Baptistes (Prodomos)," *RBK* 3, col. 616.

²⁵ See the examples in G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, I (Greenwich, Conn., 1971), 132 ff and figs. 350 ff.

²⁶ Wessel, "Johannes Baptistes," col. 616.

²⁷ For a recent summary of the christological controversies, with further bibliography, see M. H. Shepherd, Jr., "Christology: A Central Problem of Early Christian Theology and Art," *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, ed. K. Weitzmann (New York, 1980), 101–20.

was a reaction against Monotheletism, a compromise formula designed to appeal to the Monophysites, but ultimately condemned as heretical in 680.²⁸

John's role as witness to the two natures of Christ is also emphasized in the earliest representations of him as an isolated figure. Such is the case in the apse mosaic at Poreč of ca. 550, where he is one of three standing figures placed between the windows of the apse wall (Fig. 5). It has been argued that the Poreč mosaics were meant to illustrate the dogma of the divine and human natures in Christ. Christ's human nature is represented in the conch where he appears as a child on the Virgin's lap. Above, on the face of the triumphal arch, Christ the divine ruler is seated on a globe among the twelve apostles. The joining of human and divine is emphasized by the hand of God which appears from the heavens and holds a wreath over the Virgin and Child.²⁹ At present a lamb is represented in a medallion at the summit of the intrados of the triumphal arch, but this area is completely restored, and it is not certain whether the lamb was a part of the original composition.³⁰ The witnesses to the dogma of the two natures stand in the window zone below flanking a central archangel: John the Baptist is at the right, and at the left is Zacharias, who recognized his son John as the forerunner and "prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1). The extremities of the apse wall contain scenes that celebrate the Incarnation. At the left is the Annunciation, the moment of Christ's conception in the Virgin's womb. At the right, next to John the Baptist, is the Visitation, when Elizabeth and John the Baptist—the babe who "leaped in her womb" (Luke 1:41)—recognized the Incarnation.

John the Baptist and Zacharias appear again as witnesses to the two natures of Christ on a fragmentary late sixth-century ampulla from Jerusalem now in Bobbio (Fig. 6). In the upper part of the composition Christ is seated with his feet resting on a globe. He is surrounded by an oval mandorla filled with stars and held aloft by four angels. The Virgin orant stands directly below, with a large

star and personifications of the sun and moon above her head. She is flanked by Zacharias and John the Baptist along with two adoring angels. Zacharias wears the garb of an Old Testament priest and holds an incense box and censer. John the Baptist points with his right hand to the center of the composition, and in his left hand holds an unfurled scroll containing the words from John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Grabar argued that the image on this ampulla represents symbolically the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption. "The great star clearly indicates that the same God who is simultaneously represented above it and from whose feet emanate the rays of light that frame it, is present within Mary."³¹ The words inscribed on John's scroll emphasize the connection between the Incarnation and the Redemption. Because of the inscription on his scroll and his pointing gesture, John's role as witness to the two natures of Christ is even more emphatic here than in the Poreč mosaics.

In sixth-century images of John the Baptist as witness, Christ was represented sometimes in human form, and sometimes symbolically as the lamb. Very few Byzantine images of John the Baptist with the lamb have been preserved. Two important examples decorate monuments from the reign of Justinian (527–565): the ivory throne of Maximian and the mosaics in the church of St. Catherine's at Mount Sinai.³² In St. Catherine's (A.D. 550–565), medallion images of John the Baptist, the lamb, and the Virgin appear on the triumphal arch (Fig. 7). It has been suggested that these medallions constitute an early, symbolic version of the Deesis, an image which in the Middle Byzantine period included the Virgin and John the Baptist flanking Christ and interceding on behalf of humankind.³³ However, Walter has argued con-

²⁸For a discussion of Monotheletism see J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, II (Chicago, 1974), 62 ff. On Sophronius see von Schönborn, *Sophronie de Jerusalem*, chap. 3.

²⁹J. Maksimović, "Iconography and the Program of Mosaics at Poreč (Parenzo)," *ZR* 8 (1964 = *Mélanges Georges Ostrogorsky*, pt. 2), 247–60, with Eng. summary, 261–62.

³⁰See A. Šonje, "Mosaici parietali del complesso architettonico della basilica Eufhrasiana a Parenzo," *Atti: Centro di Ricerche Storiche Rovigno* 12 (1982–83), 79, 85. I thank Ann Terry for this reference.

³¹A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris, 1958), 43–44 and 60–61; A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (Princeton, 1968), 132–33.

³²A further example is preserved in Bawit, Chapel 32. A medallion image of John the Baptist decorates one of the eight niches in the room. A disc containing an image of the lamb appears at John's left shoulder. Other niches in the room contain images of the Virgin and Child with angels, Zacharias, and David. The flat walls of the room are decorated with portraits of monastic saints. See M. J. Clédat, *Le Monastère et la Nécropole de Baouit*, Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire 39², pt. I (1904), pl. viii.

³³On the identification of the group as a Deesis, see K. Weitzmann, "The Mosaic in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai," *PAPS* 110.6 (1966), 402; rpr. in K. Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (Princeton, 1982). See also G. Forsyth and K. Weitz-

vincingly that in early examples of what might later be called a Deesis, John the Baptist and the Virgin are to be understood not as intercessors but as witnesses to Christ.³⁴ Intercession is certainly not the theme in the Sinai mosaic. Loerke has shown that the images on the triumphal arch at Sinai serve as a reminder of the eschatological significance of the Transfiguration. At the Transfiguration, as reported in the Gospels, Moses and Elias spoke of Christ's "departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Afterwards, Christ identified John the Baptist as the Elias who was to precede the messiah, and who had already come. Christ then predicted that the Son of Man would suffer at the hands of those who had killed John the Baptist (Matt. 17:9–13).³⁵ Thus, in this image John's role as witness is again tied to his prophecy that Jesus was the lamb who would die to redeem mankind's sins.

The most well-known Byzantine example of John the Baptist with the lamb is that on the cathedra of Archbishop Maximian of Ravenna, made in the mid-sixth century by a Byzantine artist, possibly in Constantinople (Fig. 8).³⁶ John is represented standing in the center of the front of the throne, flanked by the four evangelists who all turn toward him. The Baptist raises his right hand, and in his left holds a disk containing an image of the lamb. As von Simson pointed out, the presence of John and the Evangelists is explained by the function of the throne in the rite of baptism, during which the bishop instructed the catechumens concerning the mysteries of the faith contained in the Gospels. The catechumens memorized the creed given to them by the bishop and recited it at their baptism as a profession of faith. Thus the images of the four evangelists holding books recall the mysteries of the faith contained in the Gospels and interpreted by the bishop.³⁷ John the Baptist is present not only as the baptizer of Christ, but also as the witness to the mystery of the redemption which is promised to the newly baptized.

As noted above, in 692 at the council held in Constantinople, the Eastern Church rejected further use of the lamb as a way of representing Christ: "... we decree that [the figure of] the Lamb ... should henceforward be set up in human form on images also, in place of the ancient lamb ..." so that Christians would be "... guided to the recollection of His life in the flesh, His Passion and His salutary Death, and the redemption which has thence accrued to the world." It is clear from these words of Canon 82 that the council's actions were prompted in part by the desire to emphasize Christ's human nature, which they saw as important for the redemption. Given the focus of the theological controversies of the seventh century, this is hardly surprising. During this period theologians tried to define how the perfect union of Christ's human and divine natures could be maintained throughout his life, death, and resurrection without jeopardizing the belief in his perfect human death, which was necessary for the redemption. A number of the solutions proposed during this period were eventually condemned as heretical.³⁸ Canon 81 of the Council of 692 condemned the Theopaschites, a group of Monophysites who had revised the Trisagion to read, "Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, thou who wast crucified for us, have mercy on us." This formula, which had been supported by Emperor Justinian, was found objectionable because it implied that God (the divine nature) had suffered and died, thus jeopardizing the belief in the impassibility of God, as well as the real human death of Christ.³⁹ Following on the heels of the condemnation of Theopaschism in Canon 81, it can be argued that Canon 82 was promulgated to insure that Christian images clearly stated the Orthodox view on the human nature of Christ. It was important that John the Baptist, who points out Christ as the instrument of humankind's redemption, should at the same time emphasize the perfect manhood of the Redeemer. And the fact that John the Baptist was represented in the art and literature of the period as a primary witness to the human nature of Christ insured that the meaning of such images of John the Baptist pointing to Christ would be immediately recognized.⁴⁰

mann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1968), 14–15.

³⁴C. Walter, "Two Notes on the Deesis," *REB* 26 (1968), 311–36, esp. 327 ff. Walter suggests, however, that the Virgin and John the Baptist bear witness to the divinity of Christ, not necessarily to his two natures.

³⁵W. Loerke, "'Real Presence' in Early Christian Art," *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. T. G. Verdon (Syracuse, N.Y., 1984), 42 ff.

³⁶See W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz am Rhein, 1976), 93–94, with full bibliography.

³⁷O. von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Chicago, 1948), 64.

³⁸See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, II, chap. 2. I have also benefited from the summary of the christological debates of the 6th and 7th centuries in A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, 1986), 35 ff.

³⁹For the text of Canon 81, see Joannou, *Discipline générale antique*, 217–18.

⁴⁰The church seems to have been successful in eliminating the image of the lamb in the East. See K. Wessel, "Agnus Dei,"

In Canon 82 the council also stated that it preferred images of Christ in human form “in order that the perfect should be set down before everybody’s eyes” In other words, the reality of Christ’s earthly life and death was to be perceived by means of the senses. This is a significant statement, and can be more fully understood if considered in the light of sixth- and seventh-century religious belief. Along with the emphasis on Christ’s human nature, Christian writers stressed the importance of sensory experience—touch and sight—for understanding the divine mysteries.⁴¹ This has already been noted with regard to the hymn of Romanos discussed above. In Romanos’ second hymn on the Epiphany, which has been seen as a direct challenge to the Monophysites, one finds an even greater emphasis on the physical experience of God, not just by John the Baptist, but by all Christians. Throughout the hymn Romanos contrasts the incomplete view the prophets had of God with the complete and tangible experience of the faithful, an experience made possible by the Incarnation: “(Isaiah) saw Him in a spiritual stupor (cf. Isaiah 29:10), as a prophet, and not with eyes of the body. But we behold with physical eyes the Lord of Hosts . . .”(strophe 7).⁴² The Kiev icon of John the Baptist also expresses the physicality of John’s witness. The hand that touched and the

eyes that saw Christ point and look to him in the icon. The viewer is invited to look with John the Baptist at the face of Christ, and to share in their visual contact.

Still more specific evidence that theologians saw the image of John the Baptist pointing to Christ as a way of making visible the dogma of the two natures is offered by the frescoes in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome. As is well known, this church was closely tied to the Greek community in Rome. It served as the entrance chapel to the palace on the Palatine used by representatives of the Byzantine emperor throughout the seventh century. The church’s seventh- and eighth-century frescoes are essentially Byzantine in style and iconography.⁴³ Such is the case with the image of Christ flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist which occupies the south face of the southeast pier in front of the sanctuary (Fig. 9). This image belongs to the fresco layer painted during the reign of Pope Martin I (649–655), who is represented at the far left of the scene, facing the viewer.⁴⁴ Christ is shown standing and holding a book; the Virgin and John the Baptist, the two chief witnesses to Christ’s humanity, both turn toward him. The Virgin’s gesture is traditional: she holds both hands open toward Christ. However, as far as I know the gesture of John the Baptist is unique: his hand is turned palm up, and he points to Christ with one attenuated finger.⁴⁵ John’s emphatic gesture, which stands out so clearly against the empty background, stresses the act of witness as the main subject of the image. It also may have been intended to draw attention to the physical nature of his witness.

The witness of John the Baptist at S. Maria Antiqua takes on even greater significance when seen in conjunction with other frescoes that were part of the same campaign. The image faces the representations of the church fathers occupying the wall areas flanking the apse, which in S. Maria Antiqua is at the south (Figs. 10, 11). The church fathers hold scrolls containing excerpts from their writings read at the Lateran Council of 649.⁴⁶ This council defended the concept that Christ had two

RBK 1 (Stuttgart, 1966), cols. 90 ff. It is interesting to note, however, that in Monophysite Egypt the subject of John the Baptist pointing to the medallion-framed lamb continued to be represented. One example is the 9th-century fresco in the Sanctuary of Benjamin at the monastery of St. Macarius where John the Baptist points to the lamb, specifically inscribed “the lamb”; see J. Leroy, *Les peintures des Couvents du Ouadi Natroun*, Mém.-Inst.Caire 110 (Cairo, 1982), pls. 4–5; and H. G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi ‘n Natrun*, Part II (New York, 1933), 96. I thank Sidney Griffith for bringing this to my attention. The subject remained very popular in the West. It appears in the initial “I” beginning the Gospel of John in two Carolingian Evangelaries. See Belting, “Das Zeugnis des Johannes und die Verkündigung an Maria,” 75 ff. There are also examples in Rome, such as the 9th-century frescoes on the arch in Room D2 in the crypt of S. Martino ai Monti. Here the lamb in a medallion is flanked by images of John the Baptist with an inscription from John 1:29 and John the Evangelist with an inscription from John 1:1. See J. Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1917), IV, pl. 208(3); and most recently C. Davis-Weyer and J. Emerick, “The Early Sixth-Century Frescoes at S. Martino ai Monti in Rome,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 21 (1984), 26. Later Western examples of John the Baptist with the lamb are too numerous to mention.

⁴¹ On the attempt in narrative art of the 5th and 6th centuries to draw viewers into the action of the scene, so that they change “from observers of a picture to eyewitnesses of a deed,” see Loerke, “‘Real Presence’ in Early Christian Art,” 30 ff.

⁴² *Romanos le Mélode*, ed. Grosdidier de Matons, II, 278. Eng. trans. based on Carpenter, *Kontakia*, I, 61. See the review of Carpenter by A. Bandy in *ByzSt* 2 (1975), 152.

⁴³ See R. Krautheimer, W. Frankl, and S. Corbett, *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae*, II (Vatican City, 1959), 249 ff.

⁴⁴ P. J. Nordhagen, “The Earliest Decorations in Santa Maria Antiqua and Their Date,” *ActaRNorv* 1 (1962), 58 ff, and idem, “S. Maria Antiqua: The Frescoes of the Seventh Century,” *ibid.* 8 (1978), 109–11 and pls. xxx–xxxiv.

⁴⁵ The strong outlines used to define John’s pointing finger can be clearly seen in the detail illustrated in Nordhagen, “Frescoes of the Seventh Century,” pl. xxxiv, a.

⁴⁶ On the identification of the church fathers and their texts see G. McN. Rushforth, “The Church of Santa Maria Antiqua,” *BSR* 1.1 (1902), 68 ff.

wills, human and divine, and two *energeiai*, or activities, human and divine.⁴⁷ Thus Monothelitism was condemned, along with the two Byzantine imperial decrees by which the emperors and the patriarchs of Constantinople had attempted to end further discussion of the issue of Christ's wills. The Lateran Council's position prevailed at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680–681.⁴⁸ Like the frescoes of S. Maria Antiqua, it has been argued that the Council of 649 was more Byzantine than Roman. It was probably originally organized under Pope Theodore (642–649), a Greek of Palestinian origin, at the instigation of the many dyothelite monks from Palestine living in Rome. Chief among them was Maximus the Confessor, who has even been suggested as the author of two of the canons.⁴⁹ The Greek texts inscribed on the scrolls that the church fathers hold in S. Maria Antiqua are forceful statements of the belief in the two natures, each possessing its own activity.⁵⁰ The theo-

logians who planned this program—perhaps Maximus himself—could well have intended the image of Christ with the Virgin and John the Baptist as a visual reinforcement or embodiment of the dogma proclaimed on the scrolls. What is more, the image may be intended to function actively, as a profession of belief in this dogma. Pope Martin I, who died in exile in 655 for his unwillingness to compromise with Emperor Constans II on the issue of Monothelitism, stands to one side and gestures toward Christ. He thus professes his belief in the cause for which he came to be considered a martyr. At the same time, by directly facing the viewer, he seems to invite our participation in his profession.⁵¹

A story told by Sophronius of Jerusalem in his *Miracles of Sts. Cyr and John* also seems to support the idea that an image of John the Baptist and the Virgin bearing witness to Christ was seen as an appropriate vehicle for a profession of belief in the reality of Christ's human nature. The story concerns the reform and subsequent healing of a member of the Julianists, a Monophysite sect in Alexandria. The Julianists, who were also called the Aphthartodocetae, argued that Christ's body was incorruptible, and thus his suffering was not precisely the same as our human suffering. In the story the reformed heretic, Theodore, is led before an enormous image of Christ flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist which helps to effect the cure of his gout.⁵² Intercession is one aspect of this image. But the image also may be understood as playing a role in the heretic's spiritual as well as his physical healing. He is led before an image of Christ with the Virgin and John the Baptist in part because such an image was seen to embody the Orthodox belief in the reality of Christ's human nature—a belief that the reformed heretic now also

⁴⁷On the use of the term "activity" as a translation for *energeia*, see Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, II, ix–x.

⁴⁸On the theology and politics of the Lateran Council, see A. N. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, III (Amsterdam, 1975), 97 ff. See also P. Verghese, "The Monothelite Controversy, A Historical Survey," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 13 (1968), 196–208.

⁴⁹R. Riedinger, "Griechische Konzilsakten auf dem Wege ins lateinische Mittelalter," *Annuaire d'histoire conciliaire* 9 (1977), 254–62; idem, "Aus den Akten der Lateran-Synode von 649," *BZ* 69 (1976), 17–38. Riedinger argues that the Acts of the Lateran Council, as they have come down to us, were originally written in Greek. Further, they may not have been originally composed as records of the actual proceedings but rather as a sort of working document prepared by the dyothelite monks for the synod planned under Pope Theodore. On Theodore's ancestry, see *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. E. Duchesne, I (Paris, 1886), 331, 333. On the birthplace of Maximus, see S. Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *AB* 91 (1973), 314 ff; and on Maximus' authorship of two of the canons, see Riedinger, "Griechische Konzilsakten," 254 note 3.

⁵⁰The texts on the scrolls, as transcribed by Rushforth, are the following: (1) On the scroll held by St. Leo, a passage from his "Tome," i.e., his letter of A.D. 449 to Flavianus, patriarch of Constantinople, against the heresy of Eutyches, which reads, "For each form does the acts which belong to it, in communion with the other; the Word, that is, performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh; the one of these shines out in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries." Trans. from *LNPF*, 2nd ser., XIV, 256. For the citation of this text in the Acts of the Lateran Council, see Mansi, X, 1097B. (2) On the scroll held by St. Gregory Nazianzus, a passage from his Fourth Theological Oration, which reads: "... so that the meaning would be, not to do mine own will, for there is none of mine apart from, but that which is common to, me and thee; for as we have one Godhead, so we have one will." Trans. from *LNPF*, 2nd ser., VII, 314; in the Acts, Mansi, X, 1077E. (3) On the scroll held by St. Basil, a passage from his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, which reads, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), not the express image nor the form, for the divine nature does not admit of combination; but the goodness of the will, which, being concurrent with the

essence, is beheld as like and equal, or rather the same in the Father as in the Son." Trans. from *LNPF*, 2nd ser., VIII, 14; in the Acts, Mansi, X, 1077E. The fourth passage, attributed to St. John Chrysostom, is quoted below in the text.

⁵¹See the description in Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien*, II, 665–66. Walter, "Two Notes on the Deesis," 330–31, suggests that this particular image is not a scene of witness but rather the introduction of the donor into the divine presence. The gestures and glances of the figures seem to contradict this view.

⁵²See *Miracula SS. Cyri et Ioannis*, chap. 36, PG 87, cols. 3557 ff; trans. in Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 135–36. This story was often cited by the Iconophiles, e.g., John of Damascus, *De imaginibus*, III, PG 94, cols. 1413 ff; the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Mansi, XIII, 57 ff; and Theodore Studite, *Antirrheticus*, II, 18, PG 99, cols. 364–65. This image is mentioned by Walter, "Two Notes on the Deesis," 329.

espoused. Thus both this image and the fresco in S. Maria Antiqua may have functioned as vehicles for the profession of belief in the dogma of the two natures of Christ. The same can be said for the Kiev icon, although the icon differs from the frescoes in placing the emphasis on the witness of John the Baptist, the Virgin being relegated to a medalion image in the upper right.

In S. Maria Antiqua, one of the texts held by the church fathers seems to be even more closely tied than the others to the image of the witness of John the Baptist since it also expresses the importance of physical experience in understanding the two natures of Christ. This is the passage on the scroll held by St. John Chrysostom which is taken from a sermon on St. Thomas the Apostle, wrongly attributed to Chrysostom. In the passage, Thomas describes how he finally perceived the truth about Christ. He says that he put aside his disbelief and adopted a believing state of mind, and "I touched the body rejoicing and shaking, and I also opened up the eye of the soul (i.e., the wound of Christ) with my fingers, and then I perceived the two activities."⁵³ Anyone who read, or had read to them, this evocative text on the scroll of John Chrysostom must have been struck by the intense physicality of Thomas' testimony. Perhaps those who planned this program meant to draw a connection between the probing fingers of Thomas and the attenuated pointing finger of John the Baptist on the facing wall. In any case, we are confronted here again with the great importance that was attached to sensual experience for the understanding of the divine mysteries.

The emphasis on sensual experience spilled over into another area, the exploration of which can add even further to our understanding of the icon of John the Baptist. In the late sixth and seventh centuries there is evident a new attitude toward the function of religious images. Being tangible objects that one can see and touch, images were perceived as having the power to prove the reality of a particular event or point of dogma.⁵⁴

⁵³ . . . ἡψάμην τοῦ σώματος χαίρων καὶ τρέμων, καὶ ἐξηπλώσα μετὰ τῶν δακτύλων καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα, καὶ δύο λοιπὸν ἐνεργειῶν ἡσθόμην. Rushforth, "Santa Maria Antiqua," 72. The author of the sermon is unknown; see *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, II (Brepols-Turnhout, 1974), no. 4574; and J. A. De Aldama, *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum* (Paris, 1965), no. 517. I would like to thank Frank Trombley for helping me with this text.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the report of an image that convinces the faithful of the veracity of an event reported in a previously unknown text of the Life of St. Spyridon, in Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 136–37. In the 7th-century *Miracula S. Demetrii* the

At least one author of the period was very explicit concerning the authority of pictures. As Kartsonis has shown in her recent book, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image*, Anastasius Sinaites (d. ca. 700) argued for the superiority of "material productions" or "material proofs" over biblical quotations in stating a theological position. In fighting against heresy, Anastasius believed that such "material proofs" are stronger, truer, less likely to be changed or misinterpreted.⁵⁵ For example, in one section of the *Hodegos* directed against Theopaschism that Kartsonis analyzes, Anastasius discusses Christ's death on the cross and specifically refers to an image, probably of the Crucifixion: "As already mentioned, we sketched on a tablet the Lord's holy cross (or crucifixion) together with an inscription, and placing a finger upon it we cross-questioned them."⁵⁶ Here again, sight and touch seem to be the crucial factors; the fact that one can see and put a finger on the image makes it more reliable in proving the reality of Christ's death on the cross than any string of biblical or patristic citations.

Texts like the *Hodegos* indicate great confidence

author describes the miracle of healing of the eparch Marianos and then tells the reader that if he has any suspicions concerning the veracity of the story he should go and look at the mosaic on the exterior of the church of St. Demetrius in which the miracle is depicted. See Collection I.24, ed. and trans. P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius, I. Texte* (Paris, 1979), 67 and 56; *II. Commentaire* (Paris, 1982), 32 ff, for the date. The story is cited in R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold* (London, 1985), 62. For a discussion of this issue in the West, see H. Kessler, "Pictorial Narrative and Church Mission in Sixth-Century Gaul," *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. H. Kessler and M. S. Simpson, *Studies in the History of Art* 10 (Washington, D.C., 1985), 84 ff. Precisely how far back this attitude can be traced and how it relates to the development of the cult of images and to the increasing reliance on and concern over the authenticity of patristic sources by Christian theologians are in need of further study. I have discussed this problem for the 9th century in "The Development of Marginal Commentary Illustration," *Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers* (Toronto, 1985), 55.

⁵⁵ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 40 ff.

⁵⁶ Trans. Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 44. Based on her study of the manuscripts of the *Hodegos* containing this passage, Kartsonis has made a convincing case that the accompanying image was originally a crucifixion. This text was already discussed in relationship to the earliest representations of Christ dead on the cross by C. Belting-Ihm and H. Belting, "Das Kreuzbild im 'Hodegos' des Anastasios Sinaites: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach den ältesten Darstellung des toten Crucifixus," *Tortulae: Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten*, ed. W. N. Schumacher (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1966), 30–39. Although the authors concluded that in the original text of the *Hodegos* the illustration was probably a diagram of a cross rather than the crucifixion, they also suggested that Anastasios' arguments may have prompted the introduction of the motif of the dead Christ on the cross already in the pre-Iconoclastic period, as evidenced by a Crucifixion icon from Mount Sinai which they dated to the first half of the 8th century.

on the part of some Christians in the power and authority of images. But there is also evidence of a defensive attitude concerning the use of religious images. In his treatise against the Jews, Leontius of Neapolis (ca. 590–668) finds it necessary to defend the veneration of icons. He does so in part by arguing that God has shown his approval by allowing the icons to work miracles.⁵⁷ Likewise, the many stories in which images of Christ, the Virgin, or the saints defend themselves against physical attack by those who do not believe in them reveal an impulse to justify the icon's right to exist.⁵⁸ Other theologians, such as John, bishop of Thessalonica in the first half of the seventh century, cited the Incarnation in defense of images of Christ: "And as of God, we make images of Him—I mean of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—such as He was seen on earth and lived among men: Him we depict, and not as He is conceived in His divine nature."⁵⁹

A seventh-century viewer, steeped in contemporary attitudes about the power of icons and aware of the attacks made against them, might also see in the Kiev icon of John the Baptist an implicit defense of the veneration of icons. Christ is represented on the icon not as another figure standing next to John, but as a medallion image—an icon. Despite the fact that there are no known Early Byzantine circular icons, there is some evidence that the medallion image had come to signify, more than any other form, the icon of Christ. This idea is supported by the use of medallion images on some other Byzantine icons of this period. For example, it has been argued that medallion portraits such as those of Christ, the Virgin, and perhaps St. John the Evangelist at the top of the Sinai icon of St. Peter were inspired by the circular imperial portraits at the top of consular diptychs. The artist of the icon borrowed not only the form but to some extent the meaning as well: just as the consul holds office under the reign of the emperor

and his associates, so also Peter holds his office under the reign of Christ and the Virgin.⁶⁰ The medallion images on these icons may also have been meant to signify the actual presence of Christ and his heavenly associates, in the same way that the medallion image of an emperor, when used in an official capacity, signified the presence of the emperor.⁶¹ On the diptych of the consul Justin of ca. 540 the medallion image of Christ is placed between those of Justinian and Theodora.⁶² At the time of the Quinisext Council an important circular image of Christ was in circulation on the new coins of Justinian II (685–695; 705–711), the first Byzantine coins to feature the image of Christ.⁶³ Thus it is possible that the medallion on the Kiev icon—a virtual replacement for the common medallion-framed lamb of Early Christian art—would immediately be perceived as the image of Christ. Pointing to this image of Christ, John bears witness to the reality of the Incarnation on which the authority of Christ's image is based.

That an image such as that on the Kiev icon could have been understood in part as an implicit justification of its own existence is supported by a passage in Theodore Studite's treatise in defense of the images. He says: "If Christ is uncircumscribable, how can the forerunner say, 'See the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'? For that which is seen is not uncircumscribable, not to mention that which is pointed out with the finger (δακτυλοδεικνυμένον). But if something should be seen and pointed out, then it would be within circumscription, as if outlined (ἐκτυπούμενον) by the

⁶⁰ Weitzmann, *Mount Sinai: The Icons*, 24–25. A medallion image of Christ is also present on the icon of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus now in Kiev, for which see *ibid.*, 28.

⁶¹ A. Grabar argued this for the circular images held by the triumphant Patriarch Nicephorus in the 9th-century marginal psalters in *L'Iconoclisme: Dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), 219 ff. Supporters of icons were well aware of Basil of Caesarea's argument as set forth in his *On the Holy Spirit*, XVIII, 45, PG 32, col. 69D: "The image of the Emperor is also called the Emperor, and there are not two emperors in consequence"; and they used it to defend the image of Christ. For example, John of Damascus in his *De imaginibus*, I, PG 94, col. 1264A, cites the passage and then comments: "If the image of the king is the king, and the image of Christ is Christ, and the image of a saint is the saint, and if power is not divided or glory separated, then the honor given to an image is given to the one portrayed in the image." Trans. D. Anderson, *On the Divine Images* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1980), 36. The passage is also alluded to by Leontius of Neapolis, for which see PG 94, col. 1384D, and the discussion in Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," 99.

⁶² Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme*, 18 and figs. 76, 77.

⁶³ P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, II (Washington, D.C., 1968), 568 ff.

⁵⁷ Leontius of Neapolis, *Against the Jews*, PG 93, col. 1601C–D. Discussed in N. H. Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," *HTR* 44 (1951), 101.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the stories mentioned in E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150; rpr. in Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West*. Kitzinger, however, does not discuss them from exactly this point of view.

⁵⁹ This passage is preserved in the Acts of the Council of 787, Mansi, XIII, cols. 164–65; trans. Mango, *Sources and Documents*, 140. See the discussion in Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," 96.

finger. Therefore Christ is circumscribable.”⁶⁴ Even though Theodore was writing in the first quarter of the ninth century, the arguments presented above suggest that a seventh-century viewer would have looked at the Kiev icon of John the Baptist from very much the same point of view.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, I would argue that the Kiev icon of John the Baptist is best seen as a product of the seventh century, when statements about both the reality of Christ's human nature and the validity of his representation in human form were of great importance. I would also tentatively suggest a provenance in Palestine. Weitzmann attributed the icon to Palestine on the basis of his comparisons to the Vienna Genesis, which is often attributed to Syria-Palestine, and to the Sinai Ascension icon, which he places there for stylistic and iconographic reasons. Although I do not find the comparison of the Kiev icon to the Vienna Genesis or to the Ascension icon particularly compelling, there are nevertheless some reasons for accepting Weitzmann's attribution to Palestine. The iconographic relationship between the icon and the Bobbio ampulla is one. The stylistic similarities between the icon and the Rabbula Gospels is another.

A third reason is the fact that Jerusalem was an important center of anti-Monothelite thinking. Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem from 634–638, was the first to lead the opposition against the doctrine promoted by Emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius. After Sophronius' death, the role of chief anti-Monothelite spokesman fell to Maximus the Confessor, who may have been from Palestine as well.⁶⁵ Although Maximus carried on his activities mainly in North Africa and Rome, Jerusalem still continued to be a center of opposition. At the Lateran Council in 649, Stephen, bishop of Dor (north of Caesarea in Palestine), requested admittance as the representative of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He recounted how he had been taken to Golgotha by Sophronius where he was sworn to continue the fight against Monothelitism and to

persuade the pope to condemn the doctrine officially. He claimed that he had been appointed papal legate to Jerusalem by Martin I's predecessor, Pope Theodore, also an opponent of Monothelitism, who may himself have been from Jerusalem.⁶⁶ Representatives from Jerusalem were present at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680–681 when Monothelitism was condemned, as well as at the Quinisext Council in 692.⁶⁷

In addition, some of the most important arguments defending images first appeared in anti-Jewish polemical tracts written in this area of the world. One can cite the following: the *Trophies of Damascus*, written in the seventh century, probably somewhere near Damascus;⁶⁸ a treatise *Against the Jews* written by Stephen of Bostra;⁶⁹ a treatise *Against the Jews* written by Leontius of Neapolis in Cyprus.⁷⁰ The latter two were often cited by the Iconophiles. Finally, the arguments for the superiority of “material proofs” cited above were written by Anastasius, a monk of Sinai.

For all the above reasons, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Kiev icon of John the Baptist was produced in the seventh century, perhaps in Palestine. Given the comparison that can be drawn between the Kiev icon and the S. Maria Antiqua fresco, a date for the icon around the middle of the seventh century is plausible. But it is also possible that the icon was produced around the time of the Council of 692, as a pictorial counterpart to the dogma proclaimed in Canon 82.

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⁶⁴Theodore Studite, *Antirrhetici*, III.31, PG 99, col. 404; trans. C. Roth, *St. Theodore the Studite On the Holy Icons* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1981), 89, with slight modification.

⁶⁵Brock, “An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor,” 314 ff. Even if Maximus was not from Palestine, he was still very much influenced by the beliefs of Sophronius.

⁶⁶Mansi, X, 892 ff; C. Hefele and H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles*, III.1 (Paris, 1909), 438 ff. On Theodore's ancestry, see note 49 above.

⁶⁷Mansi, XI, 640, 988. On the use of these synodal lists as evidence for the survival of the ecclesiastical structure in the East in the 7th century, see F. Trombley, “A Note on the See of Jerusalem and the Synodal List of the Sixth Oecumenical Council (680–681),” *Byz* 53 (1983), 632–38.

⁶⁸G. Bardy, *Les Trophées de Damas*, PO 15.2 (1927), 174 ff.

⁶⁹The text is preserved only in fragments, some of which are cited by John of Damascus, *De imaginibus*, III, PG 94, col. 1376. See also H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 447.

⁷⁰PG 93, cols. 1597–1609. On the authenticity of this text see V. Déroche, “L'authenticité de l' 'Apologie contre les Juifs' de Léontios de Néapolis,” *BCH* 110 (1986), 655–69. I owe this reference to L. Rydén.